

At present, several other sites are under development in Gallatin and Butte-Silver Bow Counties. The IMPD also is investing in infrastructure for other consortia.

How does the system work?

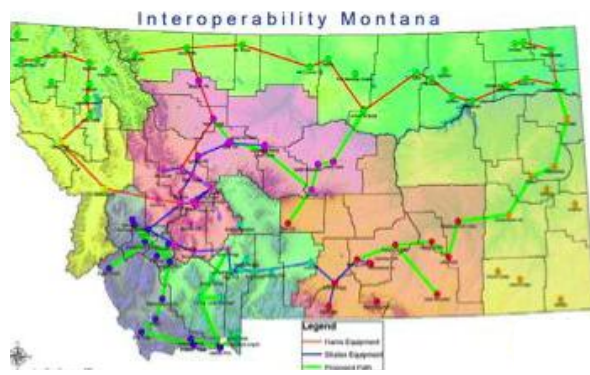
The SIEC has chosen the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials International (APCO) "Project 25" radio technology for the IM system. To use the "P25" system, responders (police, sheriff, fire, EMS, etc.) must have radios programmed to work with it. Once the radios are programmed (and in some cases, upgraded,) users then must be trained to use the system and follow best practices for interoperable communications.

Voice (and data) information will travel over a microwave transmission network. Receivers and transmitters are placed atop towers in strategic geographic locations and operated by automated "master controllers." The first master controller is located in Helena; a second has been purchased and will be housed near Glendive to serve eastern Montana.

When complete, the IM system will create a communications backbone to serve Montana from Canada to Wyoming and from Idaho to the Dakotas. Ultimately, the IM system will provide local jurisdictions with radio coverage to virtually every square mile within their borders, including areas not covered by cellular phones.

Great! When will it reach my area?

The answer to that question is complicated, since many factors go into successful completion. The Northern Tier CDP is scheduled to be complete in 2009.



The Montana SCIP envisions every consortium project to be finished sometime in Fiscal Year 2014, if funding is available.

How are you paying for it?

This work is expensive. In Fiscal 2010 alone, IM plans on spending more than \$18 million building the system.

Originally, funding for Montana's interoperability work came from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Homeland Security. Today, IM receives money from a variety of federal, state and local sources, including appropriations from the Montana legislature.

Ultimately, however, Interoperability Montana must identify stable and ongoing sources of funding to maintain the system once it's built and operating. A detailed "sustainability plan" has been drafted to do just that; finalizing that plan will be a top priority in 2009 and 2010.

Interoperability Montana
2717 Skyway Drive, Suite E
Helena, MT 59602
(406) 441-5417

<http://interop.mt.gov>

Produced by Ian Marquand

2009/07:3C



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Inter...what?

Webster defines "interoperability" as "the ability of one system to use the parts or equipment of another system;" in other words, enabling systems to talk to one another.

For Montana emergency service providers, "interoperability" means better radio coverage of the areas they serve. It also means local agencies can talk to each other more easily, regardless of location.

Is this happening in Montana?

In Montana, local governments, sovereign Indian nations, state and federal agencies, and private companies are working together to make statewide interoperability a reality. But much work remains to be done.

How long has this been going on?

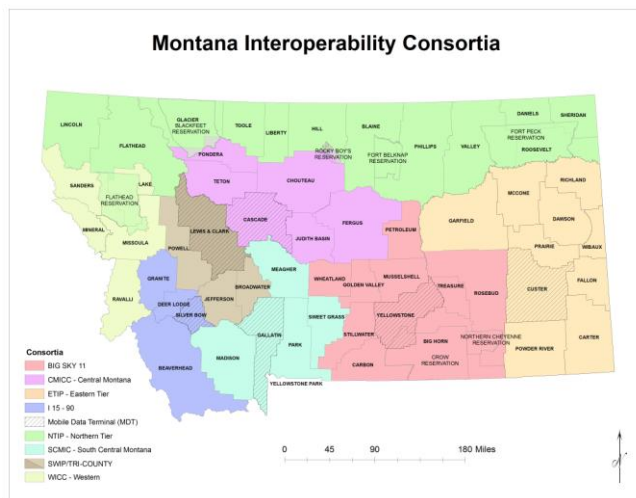
The idea of a "connected and compatible" statewide public safety radio system has been discussed in Montana for more than 20 years. The idea was to link the various Land Mobile

Radio (LMR) systems used by emergency responders. Unfortunately, most LMR systems were developed for local use, with no coordination with adjacent jurisdictions. This has led to a patchwork of radio systems of various ages and technologies.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, the National Governors Association made interoperability a top priority. Montana created its own Homeland Strategic Plan. Then, in 2004, the following state entities came together to look at issues of interoperability in Montana:

- Department of Administration (Information Technology Services Division - Public Safety Service Bureau)
- Disaster and Emergency Services
- Statewide Interoperability Executive Council (SIEC)

Their work with counties and sovereign Indian nations led to the formation of eight regional groups (each is called a “consortium”) representing counties and tribal nations across the state.



A ninth group, the “Mobile Data Terminal Consortium” also was formed to serve local law enforcement agencies (and the Montana Highway Patrol) that equip their public safety vehicles with computers.

Who’s in charge of this effort?

In November of 2005, the nine “consortia” created a statewide organization to coordinate and facilitate work statewide.

Today, “Interoperability Montana” (IM) has a small, full-time staff, which acts at the direction of the Interoperability Montana Project Directors (IMPD.) IMPD members represent individual consortia, as well as the Montana Departments of Justice, Natural Resources & Conservation and Transportation. In addition, the IMPD has several non-voting members.

The technical and policy side of interoperability in Montana is governed by the Statewide Interoperable Executive Council (SIEC), which was created in 2004. The next year, Governor Brian Schweitzer made the SIEC responsible for defining the technical requirements for “interoperability” for the State of Montana. All IM work must meet those requirements.

Is there a central plan for all this?

Yes. In 2007, the state, with input from the consortia and other stakeholders, adopted a Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan or SCIP. That plan remains the guiding document for interoperability work in Montana.

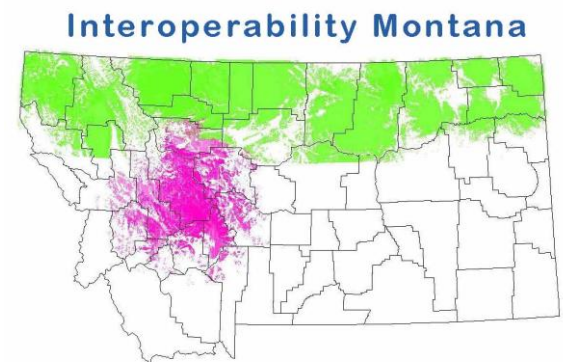
In June of 2009, facilitators from the federal Office of Emergency Communications came to Helena to conduct a workshop on how to continue implementation of the SCIP and

ensure it is in alignment with the National Emergency Communications Plan.

Plans also are being made for another workshop focused on whether the SCIP itself needs updating.

Is anything being built yet?

Yes. Actually, the first interoperable communications system in Montana began operating in Lewis and Clark County in 2005. Although that project pre-dated the formation of IM, the SIEC designated it as the first Concept Demonstration Project (CDP) in the state. Emergency service providers report that the system is effective and easy to use.



COVERAGE AREAS

PINK: Lewis & Clark County (CDP 1)

GREEN: Northern Tier Project (CDP 2)

A second and much larger Concept Demonstration Project is nearing completion in the Northern Tier Consortium. When complete, it will offer interoperable coverage across northern Montana from the North Dakota border to the Idaho state line. The Northern Tier project also will link to the Lewis and Clark County system. Together, they will provide the foundation for future work statewide.